
FAMILY STRUCTURE AND THE TRANSITION TO EARLY PARENTHOOD*

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With the rise in out-of-wedlock childbearing and divorce in the last quarter of the twentieth century, an increasing proportion of children have been exposed to a variety of new family forms. Little research has focused on the consequences of childhood family structure for men's transition to fatherhood or on the family processes that account for the effects of family structure on the likelihood that young women and men become first-time unmarried parents, what we now call "fragile families." The data come from the linked Children and Young Adult samples of the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79), which provide information on the children of the women of the NLSY79 from birth until they enter young adulthood. Females growing up with a single parent and males experiencing an unstable family transition to parenthood early, particularly to nonresidential fatherhood for males. For males, the effects are strongly mediated by parenting processes and adolescent behaviors and are shaped by economic circumstances. Having experienced multiple transitions as a child is associated with a reduced likelihood that males father their first child within marriage and an increased likelihood that they become fathers within cohabitation, demonstrating how changes in family structure alter family structure patterns over time and generations.

With the loosening of ties between child rearing and marriage in the last quarter of the twentieth century due to the rise in out-of-wedlock childbearing and divorce, more children are being exposed to a variety of new family forms and experiences, and may reproduce these patterns as they form families (McLanahan and Bumpass 1988). Such connections have been shown for women, but little is known about how unstable family structures affect men's transitions to fatherhood, including the transition into nonresidential fatherhood. Understanding the pathways that connect childhood family structure across two generations is especially important. To what extent is the intergenerational association between parental and child family structures shaped by family economic context and mediated through parent-child relationships, the ability of parents to work cooperatively, and young men's behaviors in adolescence and young adulthood?

This article focuses on how family structure and family processes shape the transition to early motherhood and fatherhood among the children of a cohort of young women. The data come from the linked Children and Young Adult samples of the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79), which together provide information from birth through young adulthood on the children born to the women of the NLSY79. We distinguish factors that predict residential status for fathers and partner status—married, cohabiting, and single—for residential fathers and mothers.

BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Until the last few years, little was known about men's transition to fatherhood, in part because their reports were often incomplete (Rendall et al. 1999; Shryock, Siegel, and Stockwell 1976). However, research on this issue has expanded dramatically, showing increased recognition that the social aspects of fertility and parenthood for women cannot

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be understood without understanding men's motivations and behavior (Goldscheider and Kaufman 1996). Despite the rapid growth in nonresidential fatherhood, however, most research has focused simply on becoming a father (Parke 1996; Pears et al. 2005; Xie, Cairns, and Cairns 2001); only a few studies have distinguished between residential and nonresidential fatherhood (Forste and Jarvis 2007; Mott 1990) or examined any of the pathways linking family structure and processes in childhood to these outcomes. Although the separation of marriage and parenthood is proceeding for men as it has for women (Eggebeen 2002), gendered custody patterns mean that men's parenthood experiences differ from women's.

Women's transition to early motherhood has been widely studied. The earliest research documented negative consequences of teen parenthood for the young woman, her child, and her family (Hofferth and Hayes 1987). Researchers argued that early childbearing was linked to less desirable social and economic conditions in the home, including family instability, low resources, and low social control. Under such conditions, early sexual activity was common and young women could anticipate few positive benefits of delaying family formation; hence, early childbearing and child rearing resulted (Haveman and Wolfe 1994).

Most of these early pregnancies were premarital, and most births occurred within marriage. However, because pregnancy was less and less often linked to marriage, even at older ages, the focus shifted to out-of-wedlock childbearing (Wu and Wolfe 2001). As it became clear that many of these nonmarital births occurred within cohabiting relationships, research began to distinguish partnered from nonpartnered childbearing and births within stable residential relationships, such as marriage or cohabitation, from those involving the variable involvement of a nonresidential father.

Like early motherhood, early fatherhood, even if residential, often leads to problems for young parents because unions between young parents are unstable (Manning, Smock, and Majumdar 2004). Fatherhood requires a long-term financial commitment, reducing young men's ability to invest in their own human capital (Manning and Smock 2000), although residential fatherhood might increase the future adult success for some young men if having a family motivates settling down (Sampson and Laub 1993). In this article, we develop hypotheses about how family structure and family processes might influence men's and women's early transitions to first parenthood, including, for men, whether they become residential or nonresidential fathers. For both men and women, we examine whether these early transitions occur within marriage, within cohabitation, or without a coresidential partner. Thus, we shed light on the formation of fragile families, a group that is of contemporary policy concern (McLanahan and Garfinkel 2000).

Childhood Family Structure and Family Processes

Unstable childhood family structure experiences influence young women's choices regarding childbearing and partnering. The negative consequences of such exposure for women include higher rates of premarital intercourse and nonmarital childbearing and cohabitation (Albrecht and Teachman 2003; Wu 1996; Wu and Martinson 1993). This may also be true for men. One study found that young white men who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s without their biological fathers were more likely to become young fathers, particularly nonresidential fathers, in the 1980s (Barber 2001).

Studies of young men and young women generally assume similar processes leading to early birth (Michael and Tuma 1985). A less attractive personal home situation and less motivation to continue in school, to postpone early sexual activity, and to use adequate contraception will lead to having a child at a younger age. Because most mothers live with their children, this creates a long-term impact for women. However, men may more easily choose not to live with their children; that is, they can opt out of child rearing. This complicates our models because we must consider that different processes lead to having a child within a relationship or not. Therefore, our male-female distinctions occur in the context of

the birth rather than in the factors leading to an early birth per se. Further, at a given age, young women are more likely than young men to be in relationships. First births to very young men are highly likely to be out-of-wedlock and nonresidential. Hence, we ask, Do the processes leading to parenthood work the same way for young men and women in terms of the relationship with the child's other parent?

The broader literature on various consequences of childhood family structure has identified three pathways of impact: social learning, social control, and instability (Albrecht and Teachman 2003; Amato 2000; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Teachman 2004; Wu 1996; Wu and Martinson 1993). We consider each in turn as they might apply to the context of early parenthood for young men and women.

Social learning. Social learning theory suggests that family type while growing up shapes family roles in young adulthood (Caspi and Elder 1988; Sroufe and Fleeson 1988). Learning about responsible involvement of fathers with children and about the ways fathers and mothers interact are important products of traditional two-parent families. Children growing up with a single mother, whether or not she eventually finds a new partner, may learn relationship habits, skills, and expectations that make forming such families themselves more likely. Boys may not learn partnering skills in this situation and hence may become nonresidential fathers. Girls may not learn partner skills and may be likely to become single parents at first birth, mirroring their childhood experiences as well. Girls may also have learned that women are capable of managing a family alone. Because the role of the male is transmitted from fathers to sons, being reared by a single mother has been posited to be more detrimental for boys' than for girls' family formation.

Exposure to nontraditional family patterns may also have other effects. In the case of potential fatherhood, the arrival of a new half-sibling in adolescence as a result of their mother's repartnering might reinforce parental role modeling, especially if this experience is accompanied by the additional responsibilities of caring for a baby. Similarly, an older sibling who leaves the household may serve as a role model for precocious behaviors, including early parenthood. It is likely that these experiences would be more strongly linked to nontraditional parenthood for young men than for young women, who normally have babysitting experience.

Hypothesis 1: Social learning. Children model the parenting behavior they experience. Compared with those with two biological parents, young men growing up in mother-only families will experience an early transition to parenthood, particularly to nonresidential fatherhood. Young women will transition to single motherhood.

Social control. The child development literature emphasizes two key dimensions of parenting for adolescent development: control and closeness (Maccoby and Martin 1983). Control refers to parents' attention to children, monitoring of their children's whereabouts and activities (Dishion and McMahon 1998), and setting rules for their behavior (Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts 1989). Greater monitoring appears to delay the transition to fatherhood (Pears et al. 2005).

Two-parent families monitor and control their children more than do single-parent families (Forste and Jarvis 2007; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Pears et al. 2005). The normally positive parenting practices of stable two-parent families provide children incentives to follow parental norms and preferences. Nontraditional families ordinarily provide less parental input than stable two-parent families because most children experience living with a single parent for some time during a transition. Even if mothers remarry, new stepparents normally provide less positive parenting because the development of consistent, supportive parental patterns may take time. Stepfathers engage in less monitoring than residential biological fathers (Hetherington, Bridges, and Insabella 1998; Hofferth and Anderson 2003).

Control strategies are even more important as children enter adolescence and a third dimension of parenting, autonomy-granting, becomes salient (Steinberg and Darling 1994; Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts 1989). Autonomy-granting encourages the development of children's decision-making skills and beliefs (Galambos and Ehrenberg 1997; Steinberg 2001). The combination of high parental monitoring and high autonomy-granting (shared rules) should lead to favorable adolescent development and a slower transition to fatherhood, particularly to nonresidential fatherhood, than other parenting types. High monitoring with imposed rules, in contrast, should lead to a faster transition to fatherhood, either because males act out or because they see it as a means of getting out of the home.

Boys and girls may benefit differentially from fathers' and mothers' supervision. Boys are given more autonomy than girls, particularly in families with nonresidential fathers (Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch 1996; Furstenberg et al. 1999), and girls report greater parental knowledge about their actions (Kerr and Stattin 2000); therefore, control strategies will be more important for boys than for girls. Early research has shown that authoritarian child rearing is more negative for boys' than girls' behavior (Maccoby and Martin 1983).

Control is not as effective, however, without a positive emotional connection to parents. Because closeness to parents declines during adolescence (Hofferth and Anderson 2003), the monitoring and autonomy dimensions of authoritative parenting should be important influences on children's transitions into adulthood. Nevertheless, closeness to parents continues to reduce adolescent behavior problems for both boys and girls. One study suggested that boys benefit more than girls from close relationships (King 2006; King and Sobolewski 2006). For boys, emotional withdrawal from mothers was linked to antisocial behavior, low grades, and weak school effort (Buchanan et al. 1996). However, that same study suggested that the mother-adolescent relationship was also important for reducing problems among girls.

Cooperation between partners or former partners in parenting children also affects father-child relationship quality and responsive fathering (Sobolewski and King 2005). Research has shown that cooperative parenting reduces behavior problems among adolescents even if they are not living with their father (King 2006; King and Sobolewski 2006). Therefore, it should reduce early transitions to parenthood, particularly to nonresidential fatherhood.

Hypothesis 2: Social control. Young men and women who grow up with rules are less likely to transition to parenthood early. However, young men growing up with rules but little say in them should make an earlier transition to parenthood than those with more say. Young men and women who experience low maternal warmth should transition to parenthood early.

Instability. Separation and divorce are major disruptions in children's lives that can be deeply unsettling, altering their day-to-day routines and undermining their sense of security for years thereafter. Thus, it may not be the *type of family* that matters to children's lives but the *number of disruptions*. Research that examined both the types of family structure changes and their number concluded that more transitions cause greater child problems than do specific types of transitions (Wu 1996; Wu and Martinson 1993).

Mechanisms cited to explain the effects of instability include stress, increased exposure to sexual activity, and reduced social and financial capital. Besides the stresses occasioned by parental conflict, family members change as children lose or add parents, stepparents, and stepsiblings and half siblings. Most changes in family structure involve more disruptions than just changes in parents because it is often necessary to move (Astone and McLanahan 1994). Families change neighborhoods and school systems, losing relationships with neighbors, peers, and school communities. Family resources may also decline. Children who experienced living with a stepparent might transition to a partnership and parenthood early either because of exposure to sexual activity at home or because of

greater conflicts within the family (Amato 2000). Girls may wish to escape unstable families and establish whatever relationships they can to regain a sense of stability, including cohabitation and early marriage. For boys, that may mean fathering a child before having the resources to sustain a long-term relationship with the mother.

Hypothesis 3: Instability. More family structure transitions during childhood should increase the chance of early parenthood. For women, growing up with many household transitions should increase early transitions to parenthood, particularly with a partner. Instability for men should increase their involvement in nonmarital relationships.

In addition to our major hypotheses about the effects of family structure and parenting styles on the timing and contexts of the transitions to parenthood of young men and women, we also consider factors that are likely to mediate or condition those relationships, and measures of socioeconomic context might also affect the transition to parenthood. These include measures of adolescent behavior, young adult behavior, and family background.

Indicators of Adolescent Behavior

We expect early experiences with family structure to influence adolescent behaviors that alter the risk of early parenthood. The most important indicator is whether the adolescent reports being sexually active at a young age. Sexually active youth are more likely to initiate a pregnancy because of both increased pregnancy risk and inadequate contraception (Albrecht and Teachman 2003; Barber 2001; Pears et al. 2005).

Early childbearing is one outcome of activities that indicate an early transition to adulthood. Youth who engage in adultlike and less normative behaviors for teens and who are more oriented toward activities outside of school than toward school pursuits are likely to be precocious in sexual activity (Pears et al. 2005). Jaffee and colleagues (Jaffee et al. 2001) found that, in the United Kingdom, having a “conduct disorder” increased young men’s likelihood of becoming a father. Hence, behaviors such as drinking, staying out past curfew, skipping school, lying, and fighting are likely to increase the chance of having a child, particularly a nonresidential child (Dearden, Hale, and Blankson 1994; Thornberry, Smith, and Howard 1997; Pears et al. 2005). Negative attitudes toward school are also likely to be associated with early sexual activity.

Young Adult Behavior

We examine the time-varying contexts within which young men and women make decisions that may lead to early parenthood. These include employment and schooling. The ability to sustain a relationship depends on financial as well as personal stability. We expect that those who are employed will transition to residential parenthood and those in school will delay parenthood (Forste and Jarvis 2007; Ku, Sonenstein, and Pleck 1993).

Other Family Background and Control Variables

Even with controls for many of the pathways linking family disruption to various outcomes, the consequences observed may reflect differences between parents who take the traditional path and other parents and/or may reflect parental responses to child temperament. We control for a rich set of measured family resources from early childhood through adolescence, reducing the potential for unobserved differences and reciprocal child influence. Urban residence may be linked to an early transition to problematic adulthood because of access to city “distractions,” the greater difficulty of monitoring children’s activities, and exposure to the sexual norms of urban underclass youth (Thornberry, Smith, and Howard 1997). In contrast, southern norms may delay childbearing, since young adults living in the South follow more traditional family pathways (Goldscheider and Waite 1991).

The children of women who began childbearing as teenagers are also likely to be disadvantaged. Hence, we expect them to be more likely to become young parents and, among males, to become nonresidential fathers, again because of lack of role models or because of limited family resources (Albrecht and Teachman 2003; Barber 2001; Hardy et al. 1998). Sons and daughters of mothers who were young mothers experience premarital births at an early age (Barber 2001). African American youth are expected to be more likely to bear a child out of wedlock than white youth (Hofferth and Hayes 1987).

Parental resources may also reduce the effects of family structure in other ways. Family type may shape how much youth benefit from remaining close to their family of origin, perhaps because two-parent families have greater resources, which provide parents leverage over their children's behavior (McLanahan and Bumpass 1988). Those reared in economically disadvantaged households will have less cause to remain at home and, hence, will be more likely to have children at a young age; males will be more likely to become nonresidential fathers. Including controls for parental income and education should reduce the apparent effects of family structure on the transition to parenthood.

DATA, MEASURES AND METHODS

Data

The data come from the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79), which was conducted annually through 1994 and biannually thereafter; we use data through 2006. Beginning in 1986, the NLSY79 obtained detailed information on children from the mothers, performed standardized assessments every two years on the children themselves, and in 1988 began interviewing children directly as they entered their teen years (ages 10–14). Starting in 1994, children aged 15 and older were interviewed using questionnaires similar to those given to their mothers; and beginning in 2000, these young adults were interviewed as a separate research project, the Young Adult Study (Mott 2002). These data provide information on two generations: (1) the women who were aged 14–21 in 1979 and were the subjects of the original study, whom we call the “mothers,” and (2) those women's sons and daughters, whom we observe in their late teens and early 20s, now called “young adults.” We could not include those born prior to 1978, the earliest year for which complete data on their mothers were collected, because we did not have information on their early experiences.

The oldest young adults were necessarily the children of early childbearers; therefore, this cohort of young adults was disproportionately drawn from families that were more disadvantaged. We have a sample of 2,949 young adult men and 2,853 young adult women born in 1978 or later who were aged 14–28 in one of the years from 1988 to 2006. All data were weighted in our analyses to represent the national population of the appropriate ages. Robust standard errors were calculated to adjust for clustering within families.

Measures

Outcome variables. Our outcome measures focus on the timing of and residence at first birth. The 2006 Young Adult fertility and relationship data were used to obtain young adults' ages at the birth of their first child. Annual files were checked to establish whether young adults resided with their children at the time of birth and whether they were married or cohabiting then. Because births occurred between survey waves, residence was determined at the first wave following childbirth. Residential fathers are all young men living with their biological children around the time of birth, whether or not the mother of those children was there. Only a few mothers did not live with their children, and they were not included in this analysis. Eighty-two percent of young men had not fathered a child by the last wave, 9% were not living with their first child at birth (nonresidential), 6% were living with a cohabiting partner and their first child, 2% were living with their wife and first child, and about 1% were single residential fathers without a partner. Among young women, 71%

had not yet had a child, 19% were single at the time of their first birth, 7% were living with a cohabiting partner, and 3% were married.

Family structure. The number of parental transitions tests the instability hypothesis and, for those with no transitions, the presence or absence of the biological father tests the social learning hypothesis. Because of the importance of family changes between ages 10 and 14 for whether young people become parents, and to test the social learning hypothesis, we included two additional family structure variables: whether the number of siblings in the household (most of whom are babies) increased and whether the number of siblings in the household declined. The omitted category is no observed change in the number of siblings.

Using household records in each wave, we distinguished cases in which the biological father was in the household for all years when the young adult was aged 0–14 (father always there) from those in which neither the biological father nor a stepfather was ever in the household over the 0–14 period (father never there). Those who had some transitions were distinguished based on whether they experienced one to three transitions or four or more transitions. We created family structure indicators only if the individual reported a minimum of three consecutive waves of data. Twenty young men had missing data due to this criterion. Young women's data were complete.

Childhood background. In order to determine whether family structure effects were independent of background factors in childhood, we computed average values for family income, the education of the residential father, the mother's work hours, the proportion of years in the South, and the proportion of years in urban areas over child observations between birth and age 14, providing a summary of early experiences. We also included indicators for Hispanic and non-Hispanic black race/ethnicity (versus non-Hispanic white and other).

The education of the spouse or partner of the mother was averaged over the years the young adult was aged 0–14. If no spouse or partner was present, the mother's education was substituted. Similarly, the average income of the spouse or partner was obtained across all years the child was aged 0–14. These are rough summary measures of average resource levels during childhood; early exploratory work, however, found no evidence that distinguishing resources during separate periods would substantially improve the models. For the 5% of fathers who were never present, an average across all fathers' incomes was substituted.

Employment hours, together with education, provide a reasonable control for mothers' labor supply and potential earnings. We used average weekly work hours of the mother to indicate her contribution to the family's economic well-being across all ages 0–14. We divided average annual maternal work hours for all years in which the young adult was aged 0–14 by 50 in order to estimate average weekly hours. Given a high correlation between mothers' and fathers' educational levels, it was redundant to include the mother's education. The age of the young adult's mother when she had her first child was directly reported by that mother and recorded in the NLSY data.

Family process variables. Data on family processes were used to test the social control hypothesis. Information was collected from children aged 10–14 in a self-administered questionnaire. If information was available for more than one year from these biannual surveys, we took the most recent data. We examined whether the family had rules, whether the child had a say in the rules, whether parents coparented, and how close the child was to his/her parents.

The NLSY asked children whether parents had rules about doing homework, telling parents where they are, watching television, and attending mixed-sex parties. Because few children had rules for attending parties (they were too young) or about television watching, we included only those about homework and informing parents about their whereabouts (2 = both, 1 = either, 0 = none). If parents had rules, the child was asked how much say he or she had in making the rule (1 = no say to 4 = a lot of say). Summing

over these two rules gives a range of 2 to 8 on the scale of amount of say. Those children who had rules about both these behaviors and who had more than the median amount of say in the rules (5 or more) were said to have shared rules (the reference category). If children had rules about homework and their whereabouts but had little or no say in them (less than 5), they were in *imposed rule* families. *No rules* children were in families with no rules or only one rule.

Closeness to parents between ages 10 and 14 was measured by three items for each parent (separately for mother/biological father/stepfather): (1) How close do you feel to your parent? (1 = not very to 4 = extremely); (2) How well do you share ideas and talk about important things with that parent? (1 = not very well to 4 = extremely well); and (3) How often does your parent miss important events and activities? (1 = a lot to 3 = almost never). Reports about the residential father were used if the respondent reported on multiple fathers. The score for father involvement was calculated as the difference between the mother's and the father's score. Those with missing data for father closeness were assigned the lowest score (across all respondents), indicating that there was not enough of a relationship for the youth to have answered the questions; "father never present" was strongly associated with missing information related to the father.

The literature defines parenting style using the three dimensions of monitoring, autonomy, and closeness. In initial analyses, we found interactions that would not be evident if they had been included separately. Therefore, we created dummy variables that describe parenting in terms of the three dimensions. We split maternal closeness at the median into two categories, high and low. We then cross classified closeness by the rules categories (1 = no rules, 2 = imposed rules, and 3 = shared rules) into six categories of parenting style: (1) high closeness, shared rules, (2) low closeness, shared rules, (3) high closeness, imposed rules, (4) low closeness, imposed rules, (5) high closeness, no rules, and (6) low closeness, no rules. Types 1 and 2 both have rules and autonomy, but Type 1 parents are warm and Type 2 parents are not. Both 3 and 4 have rules but no say in them, differing only in the extent of warmth. Categories 5 and 6 have no rules, but one is neglectful (low warmth), and the other is permissive (high warmth).

Coparenting was assessed with responses to two questions: (1) How well do your mother and (biological/step-) father agree on rules for you? (1 = never, 2 = once in a while, 3 = fairly often, 4 = very often), and (2) Do your mother and (biological/step-) father get along well together? (1 = never, 2 = once in a while, 3 = fairly often to 4 = very often). We used the mother and resident father reports if there was a father present; if not, we used the mother and nonresidential biological father reports. The two items were summed to obtain the coparenting scale.

Adolescent and young adult behaviors. In order to determine some of the pathways through which childhood family structure might operate, we examined a set of behaviors in adolescence and young adulthood. For adolescent behaviors, we examined sexual experience, school attitudes, and delinquent behavior. Data come both from the self-administered questionnaires completed when they were aged 10–14 and from their interviews as young adults. Young adults were asked the age at which they first had sex. If the response indicated that they first had sex under age 15, a fixed time dummy variable (1, 0) was included in this set of variables; if they were age 15 or older at first sex, we included a time-varying measure in later adolescence and young adulthood. The delinquent acts scale is based on the sum of nine items asked of 10- to 14-year-olds in the self-administered questionnaire, including such items as "stayed out later than parents said," "hurt someone bad enough to need a doctor," "lied to parents about something important," and "took something without paying." Item responses ranged from 0 = never to 3 = more than twice. Children aged 10–14 also answered eight items asking about their attitudes toward school, such as "it's easy to make friends," "teachers help with personal problems," and "my school work requires me to think." Answers were coded 0–3, with 0 indicating a positive attitude and 3 indicating a

negative one, for a possible range of 0 to 24. For both scales, because the child was aged 10–14, we selected the latest year in which the youth participated.

For young adult behaviors, we also created a set of variables for whether they were enrolled in school or employed each year. Young adults often combine school and work, so we created four mutually exclusive categories: working full-time (35 or more hours per week), not working full-time but enrolled in school, not enrolled but working 20–34 hours per week, and not enrolled and working less than 20 hours per week (omitted).

Methods

The analysis uses both life-table methods and multivariate discrete-time event-history analysis. The life-table analysis is based on the fertility experience of individual young men and women and used the actuarial approach. This life table was calculated for each gender and then stratified by childhood family structure within gender.

Our event-history analysis file consisted of a separate observation for each year a young person was present in the NLSY Young Adult study and had not yet fathered/borne a first child, beginning at age 14. The few cases that had a child before age 14 were omitted. Once the young adult reported fathering/bearing a child, the dependent variable became one and all subsequent years of data were deleted. Thus, young men/women have as many observations as the number of years in the survey during which they did not have a child at the beginning of the year: 14,716 person-years for men, and 14,104 person-years for women. To adjust for clustering within families and across years, we obtained robust standard errors using the software package Stata.

Analysis plan. After examining the life-table pattern of transition to fatherhood by family structure and number of transitions, we moved to a multivariate analysis of the determinants of this transition. We first analyzed the entry into parenthood for men and for women; then, using multinomial logistic regression, we examined whether the young man was living with that child at the time of birth. A third competing-risk analysis focused on whether residential mothers and residential fathers were single parents, married parents, or cohabiting parents.

The analyses were conducted with five models. Model 1 includes only the family structure variables, Model 2 adds family background controls and socioeconomic status, Model 3 adds the family process measures, Model 4 adds adolescent behavior, and Model 5 adds young adult behavior in the prior year. In our analyses, we tested for gender interactions, and in the discussion of the results, we report significant differences where appropriate.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The weighted means and standard deviations of the independent variables are based on the person-year file (Table 1). The average age in the person-year file was 17.6 for men and 17.4 for women, indicating that a majority of person-years occurred in adolescence. In 97.5% of years there were no births (not shown). Among men, 36% of person-years were of youth who experienced one to three transitions, 12% were of youth who experienced four or more transitions, and 5% were of youth whose father was never there; results for females were similar. In the remaining 47%–48% of person-years, the young men and women had lived continuously with two biological parents.

Background characteristics are consistent with what would be expected among the families of young mothers (who averaged age 21 at first birth), and young adult behavior is typical. About half of young men's and women's person-years were in families with imposed rules; 38%–39% grew up with shared rules, and 11%–16% grew up with few rules. More than 80% of both young men and young women reported close relationships with their mothers.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of the Independent Variables by Gender (weighted person-years)

Measure	Men		Women	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Family Structure Measures				
Gain siblings at ages 10–14	0.13	0.34	0.13	0.33
Lose siblings at ages 10–14	0.12	0.32	0.10	0.30
Father always there	0.48	0.50	0.47	0.50
Father never there	0.05	0.21	0.04	0.21
One to three transitions	0.36	0.48	0.38	0.48
Four or more transitions	0.12	0.32	0.11	0.32
Family Background Measures				
Education of mother's spouse	12.57	2.19	12.56	2.16
Income of mother's spouse (\$10,000s)	3.47	2.55	3.48	2.47
Proportion of years in the South	0.37	0.46	0.36	0.46
Proportion of years in urban areas	0.74	0.37	0.73	0.38
Mother's age at first birth	21.04	3.43	21.14	3.47
Mother's work hours (annual hours/50)	20.81	13.56	21.42	13.55
Non-Hispanic white	0.77	0.42	0.77	0.42
Hispanic	0.08	0.27	0.08	0.27
Non-Hispanic black	0.15	0.36	0.16	0.36
Age of the young adult	17.65	3.01	17.41	2.89
Family Process Measures				
Coparenting	5.99	1.99	6.03	1.94
High maternal closeness, shared rules	0.27	0.44	0.28	0.45
Low maternal closeness, shared rules	0.11	0.31	0.11	0.32
High maternal closeness, imposed rules	0.33	0.47	0.35	0.48
Low maternal closeness, imposed rules	0.13	0.33	0.15	0.36
High maternal closeness, no rules	0.09	0.44	0.07	0.25
Low maternal closeness, no rules	0.07	0.26	0.04	0.19
Difference between parents in closeness	1.76	2.78	2.21	2.79
Adolescent Behavior				
First sex under age 15	0.17	0.37	0.15	0.35
Delinquent activities	4.19	4.19	2.94	3.66
Negative school attitude	1.98	0.45	1.91	0.46
Young Adult Behavior				
Had sex in previous year	0.55	0.50	0.53	0.50
Working full-time or part-time	0.29	0.45	0.25	0.43
Working full-time	0.27	0.45	0.24	0.42
Working part-time	0.02	0.13	0.02	0.13
Enrolled in school or college	0.39	0.49	0.44	0.50
<i>N</i>	14,716		14,104	

Table 2. Probability of Not Being a Parent, by Age and Gender of Young Adult

Age	Men	Women
14	1.000	1.000
15	.999	.996
16	.995	.982
17	.989	.961
18	.969	.908
19	.941	.856
20	.908	.782
21	.863	.724
22	.819	.672
23	.773	.618
24	.729	.569
25	.694	.539
26	.633	.496
27	.609	.452
28	.564	.403
<i>N</i>	2,949	2,953

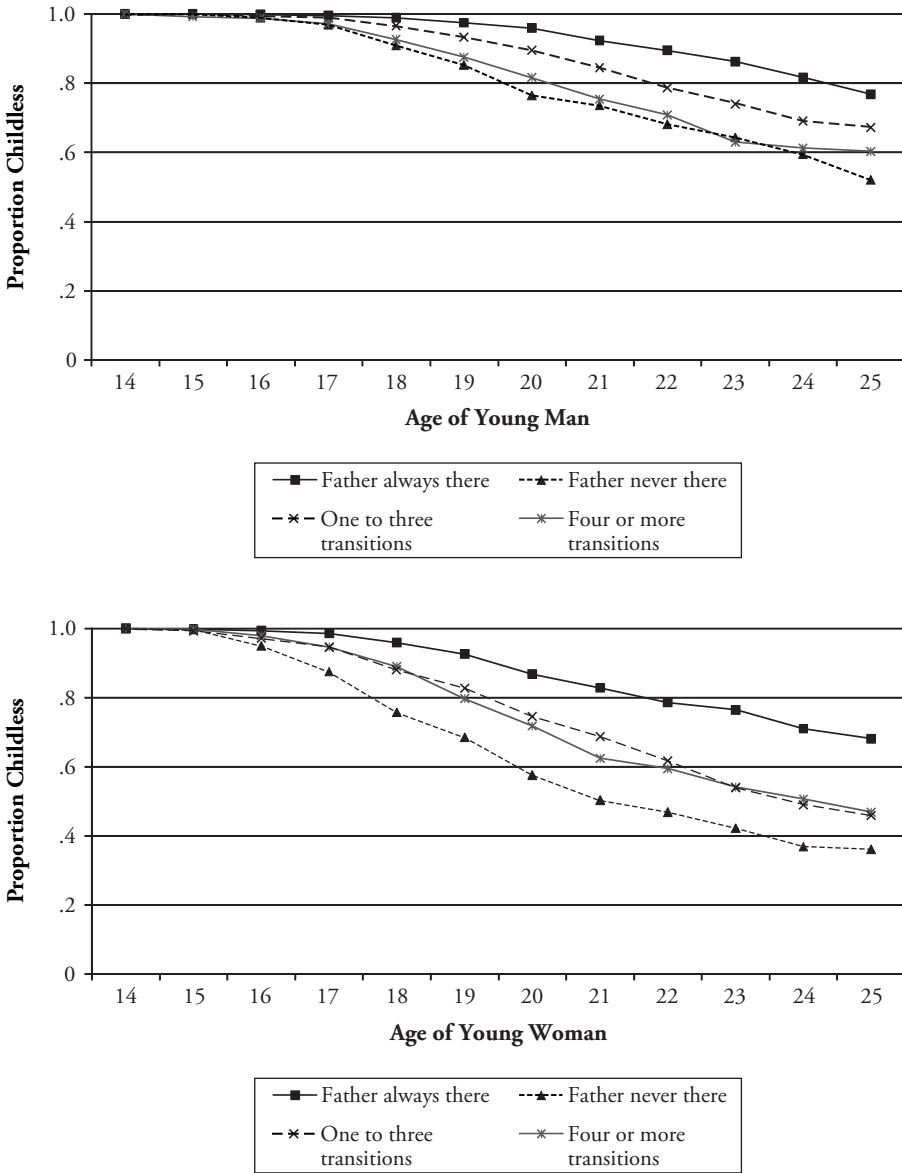
Transitioning to Parenthood

A substantial proportion of young men and women made the transition to parenthood during the period we observed (Table 2). For men observed at age 18, 3% had fathered a child; by age 21, 14% had done so. Nearly 31% had fathered a child by age 25, and 39% had done so by age 27. Among young women, 9% had become a mother by age 18; 28%, by age 21; 46%, by age 25; and 55%, by age 27. Young women transition to motherhood earlier than young men; young women are 2.5 years younger than their husbands and partners, on average (Kreider and Fields 2002). Although young men are generally not as good at reporting their childbearing as young women (Rendall et al. 1999), the fertility data from this study are better than most because they were collected prospectively and their quality has been scrutinized and edited (Mott 1990). The levels of transition to fatherhood found here are similar to those observed in other data sets (Hynes et al. 2008).

There are large differences in the probability of parenthood by family structure (Figure 1). Few young men had become fathers by age 16, but by age 18 there was a clear divergence by family structure that widened through age 21 and then stabilized. Young men who grew up with a continuous, residential father were much less likely to have become fathers at any age than those who did not, with nearly 77% still not fathers at age 25. At the opposite extreme, both young men who grew up with the father never there and those who experienced four or more transitions were far more likely to have become fathers at an early age, with very little difference between these two groups.

Family structure differences are greater for young women, and the divergence is clear earlier. The difference between those who never lived with a father and those who lived

Figure 1. Proportion of Young Men and Women Who Are Childless, by Age and Childhood Family Structure



with a father at least some of the time widened continuously until age 22. As with males, growing up in a family with four or more transitions was linked with the next most rapid transition to motherhood, but there was little difference between those with one to three transitions and those with four or more. For women, those who never lived with their father had the most rapid transition to parenthood.

Becoming a Father

We present results of our first analysis of the transition to parenthood for young men and women, with no distinction between residential and nonresidential status, in a series of five models (Table 3). For each gender, the first model shows just the family structure measures, testing the differences previously shown in Figure 1 but adding the two measures of change in the numbers of siblings. Focusing first on men, each of the nontraditional family structures is associated with an early transition to fatherhood, relative to having a continuously resident biological father (the reference group). Again, those who experienced three or fewer transitions were more likely than the reference group but less likely than those who experienced four or more transitions and those who grew up in a stable, single-mother family to have an early transition to fatherhood. Compared with those who always lived with the father, those who never lived with a father were 2.8 times as likely to become a father, those who experienced four or more transitions were about 2.3 times as likely to become fathers, and those experiencing one to three transitions were 1.8 times as likely to become fathers.

Those who gained a new sibling between ages 10 and 14 were also considerably more likely to become fathers than those who did not, whereas a sibling leaving home had no effect. The effect of gaining a sibling was not as large as the effect of change in numbers of parents and stepparents (a 50% increase in transitioning to parenthood, compared with a doubling or even tripling), but was substantial and significant. Because nearly all of these new siblings were new babies, it is possible that the experience of sharing in the care of a new baby makes men more willing to have their own.

Model 2 adds the family background variables and suggests that much of the significant effect of family structure on the transition to fatherhood for young men in this cohort is due to other aspects of family background. All the coefficients for parental family structure dropped substantially in size and became insignificant, although "gain sibling" still showed significant positive effects. The effects of the background variables are as expected and are not discussed here.

Although adding our measures of family processes (Model 3) did not further reduce the mostly insignificant coefficients linking family structure and early fatherhood, family processes themselves had significant effects. Growing up in a household with imposed rules was associated with a faster transition to fatherhood; this was statistically significant in all models for young men who were low on closeness to their mother and marginally significant in Models 4 and 5 for those who were high on closeness to their mother. This finding did not weaken with the addition of adolescent and young adult behavior.

The addition of adolescent and young adult behavior (Model 4) further reduced the family structure coefficients, providing additional evidence of mediation by such behaviors. Early sexual activity is a necessary condition for becoming a young father, and those who began their sexual careers early (before age 15) were almost twice as likely to become young fathers as those who waited until age 15 or later. Those who engaged in delinquent behaviors in adolescence were also more likely to become young fathers. Few had engaged in delinquent activities, but each additional unit score on this variable increased the likelihood of early fatherhood by nearly 4%. Attitude toward school was not associated with fatherhood. The only dimensions of young adults' time-varying behaviors in this model that affected the transition to fatherhood were having had first sex in the previous year among those who had not had sex before age 15, and working full-time (Model 5). Surprisingly, there was no effect of school enrollment.

Becoming a Mother

The effects of childhood family structure were similar for women and men before the addition of controls. Once controls were added, the results differed. Unlike the effects for men, growing up without a father was associated with an increased transition to motherhood

Table 3. Factors Predicting the Transition to Parenthood, by Gender (odds ratios)

Measure	Men (N = 14,716)					Women (N = 14,104)				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Family Structure Measures										
Gain siblings at ages 10–14	1.57**	1.44*	1.42*	1.41†	1.43*	1.31*	1.18	1.15	1.11	1.10
Lose siblings at ages 10–14	1.32	0.93	0.98	0.92	0.93	1.56**	1.44*	1.47**	1.37*	1.36*
Father always there (ref.)										
Father never there	2.78**	1.27	1.27	1.20	1.20	3.62**	2.35**	2.25**	2.03**	1.76**
One to three transitions	1.81**	1.17	1.14	1.05	1.01	2.03**	1.44*	1.35*	1.26†	1.14
Four or more transitions	2.29**	1.21	1.22	1.10	1.10	2.35**	1.39†	1.28	1.19	1.06
Family Background Measures										
Education of mother's spouse	0.87**	0.87**	0.88**	0.89**	0.89**	0.88**	0.88**	0.88**	0.89**	0.88**
Income of mother's spouse	0.80**	0.80**	0.80**	0.79**	0.79**	0.85**	0.85**	0.86**	0.86**	0.87**
Proportion of years in the South	0.70*	0.80	0.68*	0.71*	0.71*	0.91	0.91	0.91	0.88	0.90
Proportion of years in urban areas	0.80	0.80	0.80	0.75	0.75	1.15	1.15	1.15	1.03	0.97
Mother's age at first birth	0.82**	0.82**	0.83**	0.84**	0.85**	0.87**	0.87**	0.88**	0.89**	0.89**
Mother's work hours	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.99†	0.99†	0.99†	0.99†	0.99**
Non-Hispanic white (ref.)										
Hispanic	0.96	0.96	0.95	0.96	1.00	0.89	0.89	0.90	0.95	1.07
Non-Hispanic black	1.55*	1.57*	1.57*	1.39†	1.44*	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.09	1.13
Age of the young adult	1.25**	1.26**	1.26**	1.26**	1.21**	1.17**	1.17**	1.17**	1.18**	1.09**

Family Process Measures								
Coparenting	1.06	1.09 [†]	1.08 [†]	0.97	0.98	0.97		
High maternal closeness, shared rules (ref.)								
Low maternal closeness, shared rules	1.46	1.32	1.35	1.68**	1.43*	1.36 [†]		
High maternal closeness, imposed rules	1.32	1.36 [†]	1.37 [†]	1.26	1.20	1.18		
Low maternal closeness, imposed rules	1.71*	1.77*	1.75*	1.49*	1.32 [†]	1.30		
High maternal closeness, no rules	1.12	1.03	1.04	1.33	1.25	1.25		
Low maternal closeness, no rules	1.00	0.85	0.84	1.19	0.97	1.08		
Difference between parents in closeness	1.03	1.02	1.02	1.03	1.02	1.02		
Adolescent Behavior								
First sex under age 15		1.91**	1.73**		1.83**	1.30*		
Delinquent activities		1.04*	1.04*		1.03*	1.03 [†]		
Negative school attitude		1.01	0.93		0.98	1.20		
Young Adult Behavior								
Had sex in previous year			1.54*			3.43**		
Working full-time			1.43 [†]			1.51**		
Working part-time			0.96					
Enrolled in school or college			0.93			1.11		

^aWorking full-time or part-time.

[†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed test)

across *all* models, although its effects declined as controls were added. For women, the effects of instability declined dramatically but remained at least marginally significant when social class controls were added, but the inclusion of family process variables reduced the effect of four or more transitions to nonsignificance; the effect of one to three transitions remained positive and significant. The coefficient for one to three transitions also remained marginally significant when adolescent behavioral differences were introduced. Only after the effect of variation in behavior as a young adult was introduced (Model 5) was the effect of number of transitions reduced to nonsignificance. The full model was needed to mediate the effects of childhood family structure for women, whereas for men, family background alone mediated nearly all the effects of childhood family structure.

In contrast to the result for young men, for whom shared rules mattered, the family process variable that mattered for young women was closeness to mother. Young women living in a family with rules who were less close to their mother were more likely to become mothers early themselves, regardless of whether they had a say in the rules. Surprisingly, lacking rules did not increase the transition to motherhood; however, few girls (11%) and boys (16%) grew up in a family without rules. The coefficients declined as adolescent and young adult behaviors were added to the models, indicating that these other variables explained some of the effect of family processes.

Finally, as for boys, initiating sex before age 15 (or in the previous year) and engaging in delinquent activities were associated with a greater chance of becoming a young parent. As with boys, being employed either full-time or part-time was associated with becoming a parent.

Becoming a Residential or Nonresidential Father

Parenthood is a more diverse experience for men than women; almost all mothers live with their children, whereas this is not the case for men. When we examine factors leading young men to become residential versus nonresidential fathers, some patterns are general, affecting both father types, and others have a much clearer impact on one type of young fatherhood than the other. Table 4 shows the results, following the same sequence of models as in the previous tables. Here we show only the family structure and the family process results; the other results show few differences by residential type (results available on request).

The effects of family structure on residential fatherhood were significant for Model 1, but there were no significant effects of family structure in Model 2, similar to the pattern shown for the overall transition to fatherhood. The effects of family structure on nonresidential fatherhood were stronger, however, and not all of the effects attenuated with the addition of sociodemographic controls. Most dramatically, before controls were introduced, young men who grew up without a residential father were more than six times as likely to become nonresidential fathers themselves as were those who grew up with both their biological parents, and they were twice as likely to become nonresidential fathers after controls for background factors were added (Model 2). The effect of never living with a father on nonresidential fatherhood remained significant after demographic controls were added in Model 2, but was reduced to nonsignificance in Model 3 with the inclusion of family process measures. The effects of unstable family structures on nonresidential parenthood were more persistent. Although the coefficients were not significant in Models 2 through 4, there was an increase in influence in Model 5. Having experienced four or more transitions was associated with a small but significant chance of nonresidential fatherhood that had been masked but reappeared after controlling young adult behavior.

The family process measures also differentiated transitions to residential and nonresidential fatherhood. Given high maternal closeness, growing up in a household with imposed rules was associated with a faster transition to residential fatherhood. Given low maternal closeness, growing up in a household with imposed rules was associated with a

Table 4. Factors Predicting Young Men's Transition to Residential and Nonresidential Fatherhood (odds ratios)

Measure	Residential Fatherhood					Nonresidential Fatherhood				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Family Structure Measures										
Gain siblings at ages 10–14	1.67*	1.46	1.42	1.41	1.40	1.47	1.47	1.42	1.42	1.46
Lose siblings at ages 10–14	0.79	0.56	0.60	0.54	0.54	2.06**	1.39	1.49	1.43	1.46
Father always there (ref.)										
Father never there	0.94	0.61	0.65	0.63	0.66	6.24**	2.06*	1.83	1.67	1.64
One to three transitions	1.51*	1.13	1.22	1.15	1.12	2.41**	1.36	1.15	1.02	0.96
Four or more transitions	2.03**	1.20	1.28	1.16	1.17	2.80**	1.38	1.28	1.14	1.13*
Family Process Measures										
Coparenting			1.09	1.11	1.10			1.04	1.07	1.07
High maternal closeness, shared rules (ref.)										
Low maternal closeness, shared rules			1.37	1.29	1.34			1.51	1.35	1.33
High maternal closeness, imposed rules			1.74*	1.79*	1.85*			0.88	0.92	0.89
Low maternal closeness, imposed rules			1.23	1.33	1.32			2.48**	2.47**	2.41**
High maternal closeness, no rules			0.96	0.93	0.95			1.21	1.08	1.06
Low maternal closeness, no rules			1.10	1.02	1.02			0.85	0.69	0.67
Difference between parents in closeness			0.99	0.98	0.97			1.09	1.09	1.08

Notes: N = 14,716. Controls included in each model are the same as in Table 3.

*p < .05; **p < .01 (two-tailed test)

faster transition to nonresidential fatherhood. None of the other family process measures was associated with young men's transition to fatherhood.

Becoming a Residential Married, Cohabiting, or Single Parent

Residential parenthood is clearly a "better" choice than nonresidential parenthood, but the status of the coparental relationship—whether a committed partner is present—is also likely to have consequences. In Table 5, we show for men and women the association between family structure measures and the transition to married residential parenthood, cohabiting residential parenthood, and single residential parenthood, showing only Models 1, 2, and 5. The general pattern of nonstandard family structures accelerating the transition to parenthood that we saw in earlier analyses does not hold for all partner statuses. The different associations between specific childhood family structure types and partner status at transition explain the weak association across all residential statuses.

For men, having experienced more transitions in childhood was associated with a reduced speed of transition to married fatherhood and an increased speed of transition to cohabiting fatherhood, relative to remaining childless, a statistically significant difference. There was also a significant increased speed of transition to single fatherhood in Model 1. There was no association between never having lived with a father and parenthood transitions for young men. For men, gaining a sibling was associated with transitioning to cohabiting parenthood, whereas losing a sibling did not affect type of residential transition.

For women, never having lived with the father accelerated the transition to both married and single parenthood (but had no effect on cohabiting parenthood). In contrast to men, for women, having had more transitions was significantly associated with increased married parenthood, though this association weakened once other variables were controlled. It was also associated with a faster rate of transition to single parenthood. Also in contrast to men, gaining a sibling was associated with a transition to married parenthood, whereas losing a sibling was associated with a transition to cohabiting or single parenthood.

Another unusual aspect of the effect of nontraditional family structure on the transition to married fatherhood is that, unlike the situation in which adding controls weakened its effects on transitions to fatherhood, adding controls actually *strengthened* the negative association between experiencing four or more transitions and the transition to married fatherhood. The association was suppressed by income and educational influences on both whether young men father a child and whether they marry. Of course, the number of married fathers is small, so these results are only suggestive. Sample sizes were also too small to estimate the effects of different parenting styles on partner status among residential parents.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This analysis has identified factors linked to early parenthood for both young men and young women. We paid particular attention to the pathways linking family structure and parenthood that run through socioeconomic circumstances, family processes, and problematic adolescent behaviors. Support for our hypotheses was strong. Boys who grew up with a single parent or who experienced instability due to multiple transitions reproduce this pattern when they become parents themselves. They have a substantially higher likelihood of entering fatherhood early, but they are less likely to marry and are particularly likely to become nonresidential fathers. Girls who never lived with a father or who lived with several father figures are more likely to transition to motherhood early, both to single and to married (but not cohabiting) motherhood.

Which theoretical explanations of family structure effects were supported? For boys, *instability* was supported as an important process in childhood affecting parenthood. It was more consistent than *social learning* in its effects on whether the young man fathered a child and on its residential context.

Table 5. Family Structure and the Transition to Parenthood, by Partner Status and Gender (odds ratios)

Measure	Residential Parenthood, Married			Residential Parenthood, Cohabiting			Residential Parenthood, Single		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 5	Model 1	Model 2	Model 5	Model 1	Model 2	Model 5
Men									
Family structure measures									
Gain siblings at ages 10–14	1.30	0.94	1.17	1.98**	1.80	1.64	0.17	0.14	0.11
Lose siblings at ages 10–14	0.45	0.34	0.36	0.78	0.55	0.49	1.76	1.12	0.96
Father always there (ref.)									
Father never there	0.29	0.14	0.12	1.11	0.81	0.98	1.79	0.85	0.63
One to three transitions	0.92	0.74	0.70	1.68*	1.30	1.32	2.08	0.95	0.99
Four or more transitions	0.41	0.24*	0.19*	2.41**	1.50	1.57	4.81*	1.55	1.23
Women									
Family structure measures									
Gain siblings at ages 10–14	2.18*	2.05	2.09*	0.96	0.85	0.85	1.35	1.20	1.07
Lose siblings at ages 10–14	1.05	0.96	0.88	1.90*	1.87*	1.84*	1.52*	1.39	1.34
Father always there (ref.)									
Father never there	2.00	3.89*	5.24*	0.84	0.79	0.62	7.03**	3.00*	2.18**
One to three transitions	2.39*	2.06*	2.20*	1.23	0.99	0.75	2.79**	1.74*	1.32
Four or more transitions	2.46*	1.63	1.83	1.40	0.92	0.70	3.19**	1.74*	1.23

Note: N = 14,716 for men, and N = 14,092 for women.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed test)

Having grown up with a single parent (social learning) or having experienced many transitions (instability) predicted faster transitions to residential or nonresidential fatherhood for young men in the first model without controls. Including family background measures in the model reduced the effects of both nontraditional family structure experiences on transitions to fatherhood, suggesting that early parenthood occurs because of limited resources at home, which are associated with single-mother and unstable family structures.

The effect of high instability—that is, experiencing four or more transitions—remained associated with becoming a nonresidential father in the final models. In addition, examining differences among residential fathers, we found that having experienced a high number of transitions was associated with a significantly lower risk of becoming a married father and a higher risk of becoming a cohabiting father. Instability appears to be especially troublesome for men's ability to enter into stable parenting relationships. The effects of growing up with a single mother were in the same direction but weaker. Support for the *social learning*, or role modeling, explanation for boys was provided by the association between gaining a sibling and a faster transition to fatherhood, particularly within cohabitation. The experience of sharing in the care of a baby may make men more willing to have their own.

Social control theory was also supported for boys. For them, the most important family process associated with reducing the early transition to fatherhood was having a say in the family rules. Parental warmth distinguished only the type of transition, not its timing. Having rules imposed was associated with a faster transition to residential fatherhood if the relationship with the mother was warm and a faster transition to nonresidential fatherhood if not. Better parenting practices, such as letting adolescent boys have some say in setting rules, reduced the likelihood of becoming an early father. Because of their greater autonomy, boys may simply reject rules that they have not participated in setting, and limiting their activities is difficult.

The process differed for girls. The strongest associations with early parenthood were those of living with a single mother and never with the father throughout childhood, which remained significant in all models. The results provide more support for the *social learning* hypothesis than for the *instability* hypothesis. Examining transitions to married, cohabiting, and single parenthood, we found that having always lived with the mother and never having lived with the father was associated with a faster transition both to residential married motherhood and to single motherhood. In contrast, a high number of transitions was less strongly linked to greater marital or single motherhood. This fits with the idea that young women are socialized into single parenthood; young women who grew up in single-mother households are more likely to become single mothers themselves. Surprisingly, they were also likely to marry, though the proportion who married was small. Some additional support for the effect of social learning was provided by the significance of gaining a sibling, which was associated with a higher rate of transition to married motherhood.

The *social control* hypothesis was not salient for girls. Compared with families in which closeness was high and the child had a say in the rules, having no say or no rules did not affect childbearing. What mattered was whether the daughter and mother were close. Those who reported that they were not close to the mother were more likely to become mothers early, regardless of the type of rule-setting in their family.

Finally, as other studies have found, children's sexual and delinquent behaviors were excellent predictors of an early transition to parenthood for both boys and girls, and positive social control efforts would likely reduce these behaviors. Working in young adulthood provides the resources for supporting a family, and we found that employment was associated with parenthood for both men and women.

The strengths of the study include data collected prospectively from multiple informants over the entire lifetime on the young adult, the availability of measures of family process and adolescent behavior, and the focus on a recent and policy-relevant group of

young adults. Nevertheless, there are several weaknesses. First, these young adults are still relatively young; whether our results hold up as more of these adults enter parenthood remains to be seen. Second, the measures of parenting are limited to mothering because this was a study of the children of mothers.

Based on these results, we draw the following conclusions. First, growing up without two parents has intergenerational consequences. Young men who experienced substantial instability growing up are themselves more likely to experience disrupted fathering and go on to become absent fathers. Girls apparently do not learn appropriate relationship skills if they grow up in families without their fathers, even if the family structure is stable, and this leads them to rear children in such families themselves. Second, many of the intergenerational effects operate through the correlates—perhaps causes and perhaps consequences—of disrupted family structures: socioeconomic disadvantage, weakened parenting, and problematic adolescent behaviors. Breaking the cycle, then, could occur at any of these points, but most powerfully by breaking the connection between family structure and poverty. Lower income and education of the mother's partner, the father figure to the child, remain significantly associated with the likelihood that their son will father a child that he does not subsequently live with. This suggests that continued failure to address economic disadvantage will result in reproducing patterns that are disadvantageous for all concerned. Third, parenting patterns make a difference. Programs to help improve parenting skills may help alleviate some of the avoidable negative consequences of family transitions and instability.

This research is the first to elaborate how family structures during childhood are associated with young men's nonresidential as well as residential parenthood and, among the latter, parenting with a marital or cohabiting partner or as a single person for both men and women. It contributes by showing how parenting processes and adolescent behaviors explain some of the effects of family structures on the transition to parenthood. Finally, it points to the continued influence of socioeconomic disadvantage on the early transition of young men and women to parenthood.

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